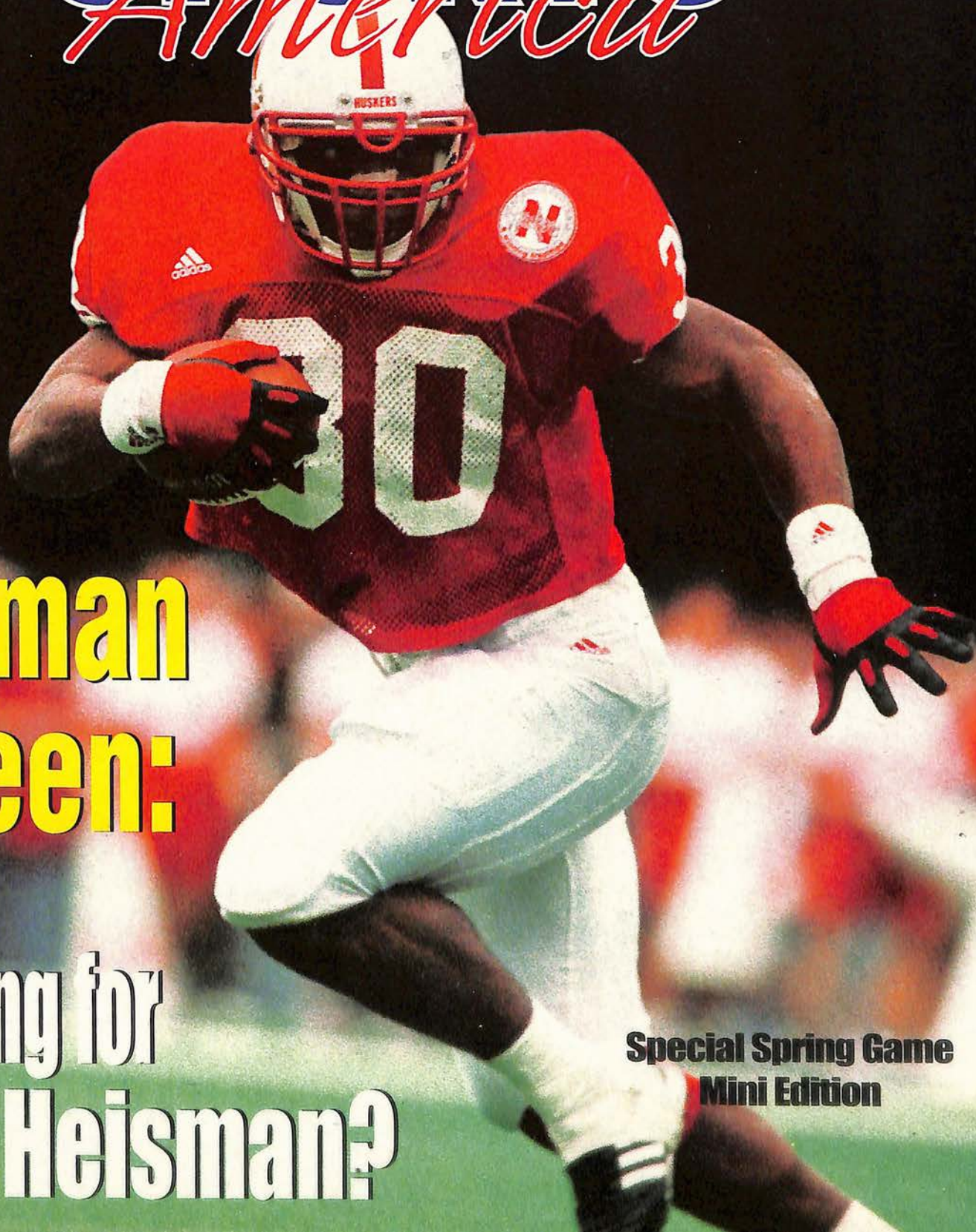


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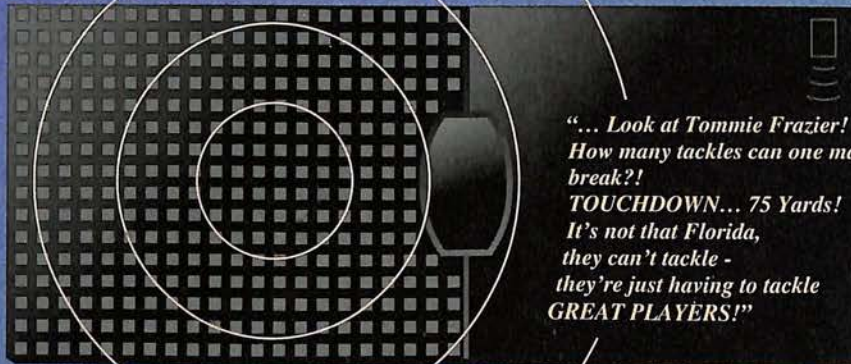
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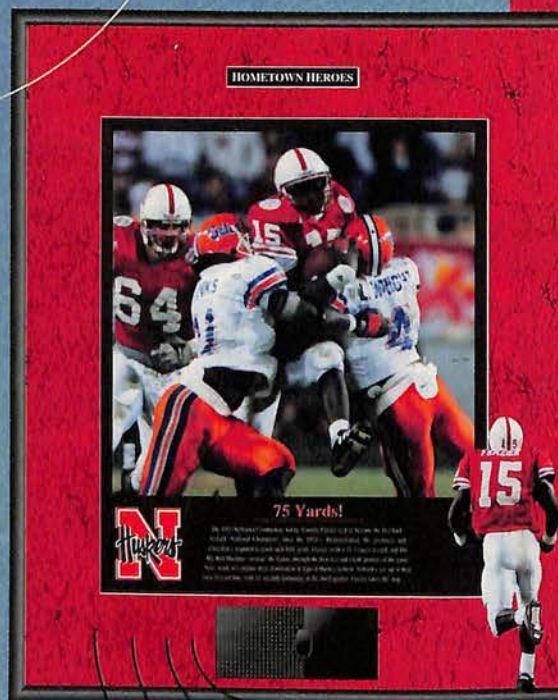
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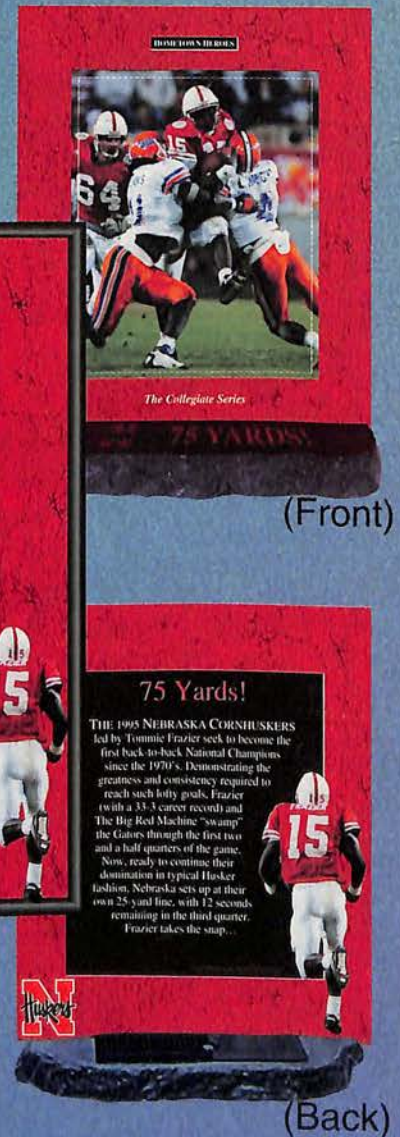
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Out of BOUNDS

BY JIM ROSE



The Never-Ending Story

Funny thing happened at the stadium the other day. Somebody unlatched the gates two hours before kickoff and all the believers came pouring through.

The concessionaires loaded up for 50,000 plus, the P.A. guy went over pronouncements. Each daily newspaper stuffed the press box with three writers, the head coach struggled with 20 clichéd questions, wishing it were only one. We had officials, fans who got hoarse, limber cheerleaders, corporate free lunches consumed by fat cats there to be seen more than to see — and, who are dadgum sure this is THE tastiest prime-rib EVER.

A country music act, headset radios hugging rows of ears, big names, no names, funny names, new names, funny hats, red pants, those dumb cars that keep playing the first line of the fight song, dogs and burgers roasting, covert Silver Bullets slipping past the dudes in yellow jackets. And, all of it for a practice. All of it for a pickup game. All of it just to be there when a bunch of college guys choose up teams and play some football. Simple deal. Half of them wear the red shirts, the other half white.

Ah, yes — Spring Game day in Lincoln. Only in Nebraska do the fans practice. Only in Nebraska do people postpone April weddings for fear it might conflict with a scrimmage. Only in Nebraska do the yellow, white and purple perennials hold off until after the Red-White game. Only in Nebraska do thousands gather around Tom Osborne's house in February to see how many weeks remain in winter conditioning.

And while it usually takes until

August to see how big and beefy the actual corn crop promises to be, the football Cornhuskers' harvest is in the barn by May Day.

Only in Nebraska are the football players as much The Boys of Spring as they are The Boys of Autumn.

This is one addiction for which Nancy Reagan would just say "Yes." Spring football is the mid-term fix. It's a happy co-dependency that confounds shrinks all over town until they catch it.

Nebraskans are to football what Rodney King is to getting along. Most of the rest of the world is clued in from August to January. Truth is, the season never stops around here. Springtime is actually the best time to stay off the wagon.

It is this time of year when Nebraska football is taught. The fans may get into the regular season hype of playing somebody else while the apostles of this great game revel in springtime game plans to slow down Koy Detmer. No extra attention to Florida's 15-receiver offense.

Rather, springtime is when Dr. Oz sows the fundamentals of blocking, tackling, catching, defending, kicking and winning. It is in the spring when the rite-of-who-plays is renewed. Each practice is ferocious.

The bloodier the better. If a fight or three doesn't break out, the coaches keep 'em late. Here, the champions are guilded. Fall's wars are won through the springtime battles.

No place challenges legacy's greatness more than Nebraska where incredibly, "next year" is expected to be better. Remarkably though, there is no "next year" year, for each year there is no ending. ■

Story by Dave Mollner Photos by Eric Francis

Heisman ON THE HORIZON?

Ahman Green has the look of a winner in the race for college football's most coveted trophy

In an election year packed full of candidates and grid-iron debates, Nebraska's Ahman Green has the potential to claim his own seat upon the Heisman voters' bandwagon this season by addressing five critical issues during the early stages of his sophomore campaign.

Green, a USA Today high school All-American at Omaha Central, seemingly possesses all the attributes of a top athletic specimen. He carries just four percent body fat on his 6-foot, 210-pound frame and has a vertical leap of more than three feet (39 inches).

He is also the second-fastest Husker ever over 40 yards, with a sizzling 4.34-second clocking — a half-step behind former I-back Keith Jones, who was timed at 4.33 when he played from 1984-87.

Last year, he became only the fourth freshman in Big Eight history to surpass the 1,000-yard mark and the 37th player overall in the NCAA ranks.

Previous Heisman winners from the Big Eight such as Oklahoma's Billy Sims (1978), Oklahoma State's Barry Sanders (1988) and Colorado's Rashaan Salaam (1994) weren't nearly as productive as Green during their freshman seasons, amassing a mere 95, 325 and 158 yards respectively.

One characteristic tying Green's freshman year with Sanders' was that both played behind future National Football League backs.

While playing behind a future Pro

Bowler in Thurman Thomas, Sanders could only muster two TDs on 74 carries. In 1995, Green took 141 of Nebraska's 627 total rushing attempts and mowed his foes over for an incredible 1,086 yards and 13 TDs, while serving as Lawrence Phillips' backup part of the season.

So far, Heisman history is definitely looking greener.

However, no sophomore ever has won the coveted bronze statue, presented annually by the Downtown Athletic Club of New York. Most recently, tailbacks Herschel Walker of Georgia and Marshall Faulk of San Diego State have come closest. Walker finished third as a freshman and second as a sophomore. Faulk finished a close second to Miami quarterback Gino Torretta in 1992 as a sophomore.

When Walker gained 3,500 yards in his first two collegiate seasons — including a whopping 1,891 as a sophomore — he garnered a tremendous amount of national attention and Heisman consideration, but was ultimately shunned by voters, who selected running back Marcus Allen, a senior at USC. But class standing, once a heavily weighed factor, doesn't figure as prominently in voters' minds today with the proliferation of top players leaving college early for the NFL.

"Green's sophomore status might be a factor, but the prospect of an early departure has changed that," said Malcolm Moran, a former Heisman Trophy voter and current national foot-

ball writer for the New York Times.

With a scant four-and-a-half months to go before the first kickoff, Sports America offers up five key factors which may ultimately lead to the inauguration of Nebraska's third Heisman Trophy winner.

1 Rack up the yards early

One prerequisite for a successful run at college football's most prestigious award is piling up big yardage, along with frequent trips into the end zone, early in the season. Despite playing for a team that lost three of its first five games, Iowa State's Troy Davis hit the 1,000-yard mark in the fifth week of the season, instantly vaulting him into the upper echelon of the weekly "Heisman Watch."

What are Green's prospects for a big start? Nebraska's first six opponents on the schedule this fall surrendered an average of 156.8 rushing yards a game last year. Michigan State and Arizona State's defense against the run look the most vulnerable, having allowed a combined average of 199 yards per game last year. In East Lansing last year, the Huskers ripped Michigan State for 552 yards and six rushing scores, while the Sun Devils were scorched for 395 yards and seven trips into the end zone in Lincoln.

Last year, Green found the end zone 13 times, nearly breaking Walker's NCAA freshman record of 15. In com-



parison, Walker carried the ball more than twice as many times (374) than Green (141) did in his first season, while gaining only 530 more yards.

Assuming he earns the starting I-back job over senior Damon Benning and junior James Sims, Green will have a much better opportunity to showcase his skills than when he backed up Phillips for the first two games of the season, spent the next three sharing time with Benning and Clinton Childs, and started the final six.

2 Development of the offensive line

After racking up 12 national rushing titles, it almost is taken for granted that monstrous offensive linemen will be opening gaping holes in opposing defenses for the Husker backs.

But with the departure of one All-American and some reshuffling of two top returners, the 1996 season is certain to be a pivotal one for the front five and the production of Nebraska's running game, particularly Green.

Gone is dependable All-American center Aaron Graham. Moving over to replace him is All-Big Eight guard Aaron Taylor, who started every game last year at left guard.

Also lost to graduation is right guard Steve Ott, who will be replaced by Jon Zatechka, who saw ample playing time at that position in '95.

Two other All-Big Eight players also return: Chris Dishman, who started every game at left tackle last year in earning All-Big Eight honors, has moved to left guard.

And Adam Treu, who alternated with All-Big Eight right tackle Eric Anderson last year, will start at left tackle.

Depth is seemingly in place with the Huskers having at least one letter winner backing up every position on the offensive line.

Not to be overlooked is the blocking at the line by tight ends and downfield by wide receivers.

Tight ends Sheldon Jackson and Vershan Jackson saw extensive duty last year, while Brendan Holbein, Jon Vedral and Kenny Cheatham return at split end and wide receiver.



The fastest Husker on the field, four times Green broke runs of over 50 yards last season.

3 Playing for a winner

Everybody loves a winner. Just ask Iowa State's Davis. The junior-to-be became only the fifth rusher in NCAA

Division I-A history to gain more than 2,000 yards in a season with 2,010 yards last year. But the shine on those stellar numbers was dulled by the Cyclones' 3-8 record.

During the past 20 years, only three

Continued on page 8

Nebraska Photographer Rick Anderson Presents:

THE BIG RED ADVENTURE

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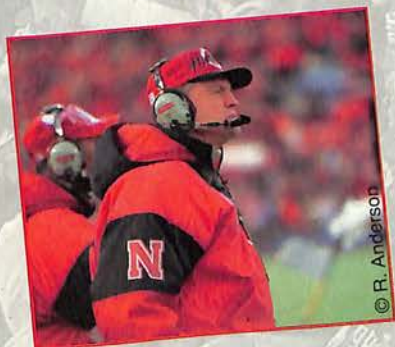
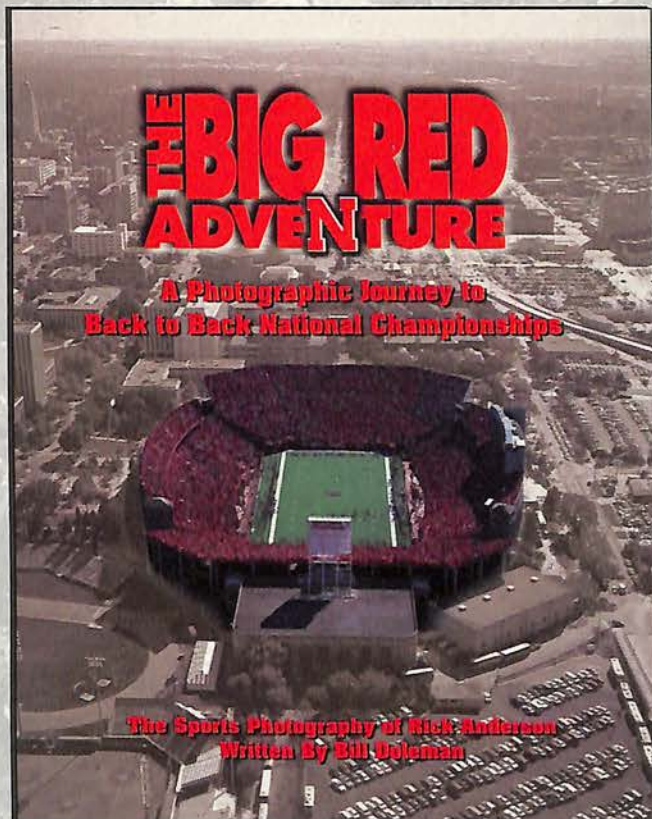
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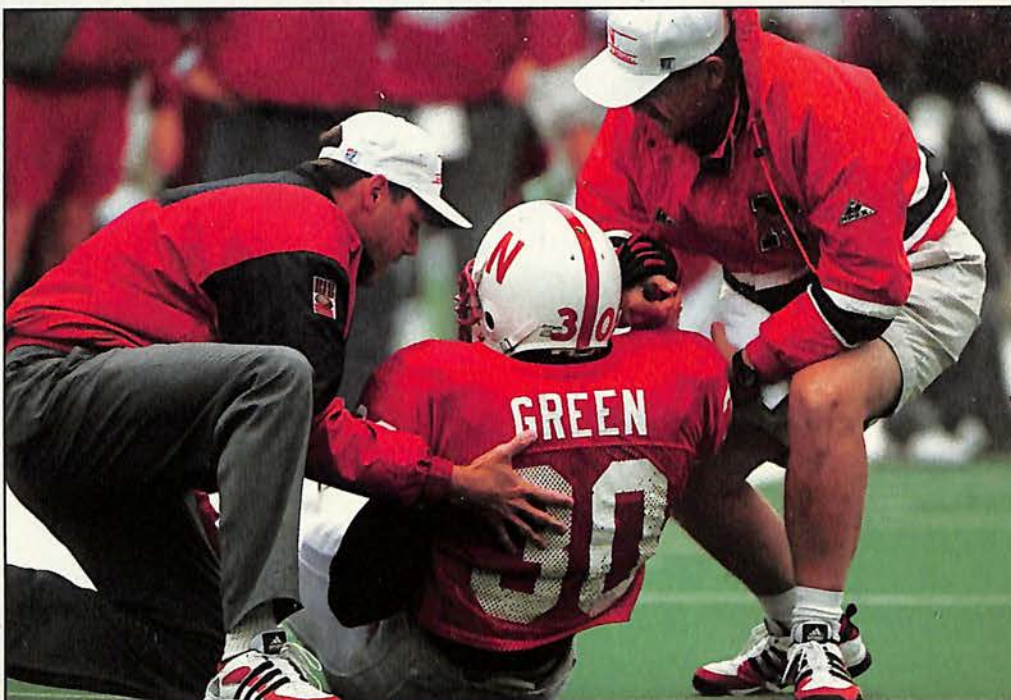
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Along with a good start, Green also must be able to withstand the week-to-week grind and punishment of carrying the ball 15 to 25 times a game.

Continued from page 4

Heisman winners — George Rogers of South Carolina (1980), Bo Jackson of Auburn (1985) and Ty Detmer of Brigham Young (1990) — have played on teams that failed to finish in the final Top 20 of The Associated Press.

In his freshman year, Green definitely benefited from the national spotlight beamed on the Huskers and their quest for a second consecutive national championship. That naturally leads to being top-of-mind among voters.

4 Good showings on television

Currently, only two of Nebraska's 11 regular season games — the home opener against Michigan State Sept. 7 and the regular season finale against Colorado — are confirmed for broadcast either regionally or nationwide. Three other regular season games, Kansas State, Kansas and Oklahoma, are likely to be regionally televised, along with the national broadcast of the Big 12 Championship Game in St. Louis.

The advent of cable sports networks such as ESPN, ESPN 2, CNN, Prime Sports Network and WTBS have played

a significant role in the exposure of leading candidates to Heisman voters. Prior to shows such as ESPN's SportsCenter and College Game Day, voters often had to rely on newspaper and wire accounts of games the following day. Nowadays, most writers and broadcasters return to their hotels and flick on the television for an in-depth review of Saturday's highlights.

In 1994, a slashing runner from the Big Eight charged onto the Heisman ballot early in his junior season. He was Colorado's Salaam. Remember the "Miracle Catch" Michael Westbrook reeled in from Kordell Stewart? Salaam rushed for 141 yards and two TDs that day, and while his performance was overshadowed, he didn't exit stage left.

Instead, he waited until the following week and blasted Texas for 317 yards in another ABC televised game. The promotion for Salaam over Stewart and Westbrook that year as Colorado's poster boy was evident, especially after the nation watched six of the Buffs' first eight contests on ABC and ESPN telecasts.

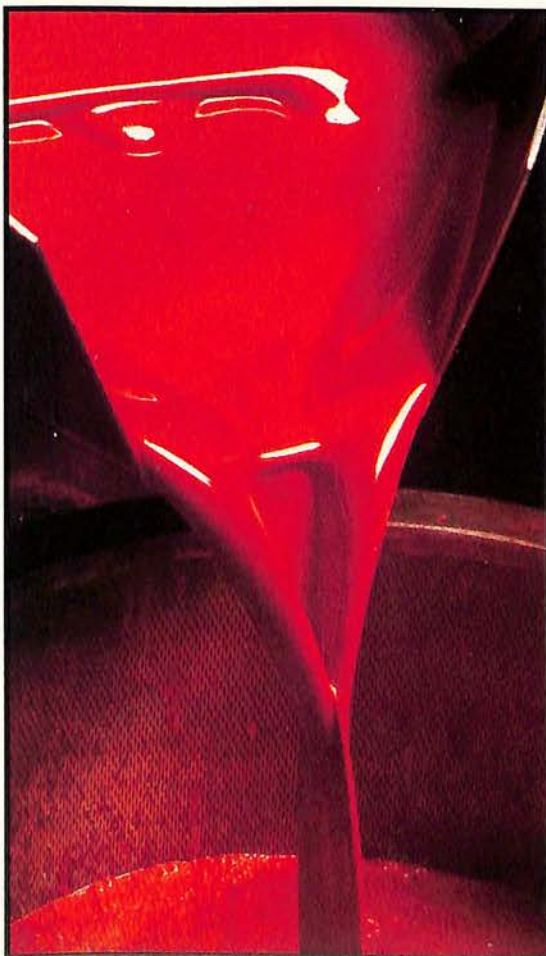
Last year, Ohio State made out like bandits instead of Buckeyes when all 13 of its games were televised (nine nationally). One of their most-hyped games came at home against Notre Dame on NBC when Eddie George pummeled the Fighting Irish for 210 yards and two

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TDs. And with the ballot deadline approaching on Nov. 15, George shattered Ohio State's single-game rushing record against Illinois in a 314-yard track meet. Those strong performances contributed to his Heisman victory over Nebraska's Tommie Frazier.

5 A low-key publicity campaign

On page 16 of this year's Nebraska's spring football prospectus, Green is humbly listed under the category "All-America and Major Award Candidates" along with three other Huskers. Sports Information Director Chris Anderson said Nebraska's policy always has been not to spend additional money on gimmicky items such as full-color posters, flyers or highlight tapes.

"We do all we can within our normal means to accommodate all voters but we don't go out of our way to send a bunch of flyers that are only going to end up in the trash," Anderson said.

Former Lincoln Journal-Star sports

editor Brian Hill said his department was flooded with flyers, posters and other promotional pieces from schools selling their prospective candidates. Some "candidates" had more name recognition than others.

"You admire those people for trying, but it's not too realistic unless you're from a major school," Hill said.

Some schools believe the flyers and "hype mail" is necessary. When Sanders was making his bid in 1988, Oklahoma State's sports information department targeted voters west of the Mississippi River in an attempt to dilute the constant exposure UCLA's Troy Aikman and USC's Rodney Peete were receiving out West. Unlike the bigger schools' football tradition and market share in Southern California, Sanders did most of his lobbying with his on-the-field play, as only one of his games was televised on ESPN.

Some schools go to even greater

RUNNING FOR THE HEISMAN

Here is a look back at the year-by-year rushing totals of the last six running backs to win the Heisman Trophy. (*Year won Heisman)

Player, School	Fr.	Soph.	Jr.	Sr.
Herschel Walker, Georgia, 1982	1,618	1,891	1,750*	—
Mike Rozier, Nebraska, 1983	—	943	1,689	2,148*
Bo Jackson, Auburn, 1985	829	1,213	475	1,786*
Barry Sanders, Oklahoma St., 1988	325	622	2,628*	—
Rashaan Salaam, Colorado, 1994	158	844	2,055*	—

lengths. Last year, Davis' Heisman campaign included a song by a local Ames, Iowa, band, sung to Muddy Waters' "Hoochie Coochie Man."

*"I've got a laced pigskin,
I've got a helmet, too.
My name is Troy Davis,
I'm gonna run around you.
Yeah, my offensive line
does the best that it can.
And the world's gonna know,
I'm your Heisman Trophy Man."*

If there is one thing for certain about Green and his Heisman Trophy chances in 1996, it's this: You won't hear anyone singing about it. ■

Contributing: Brian Todd, Sean Weide




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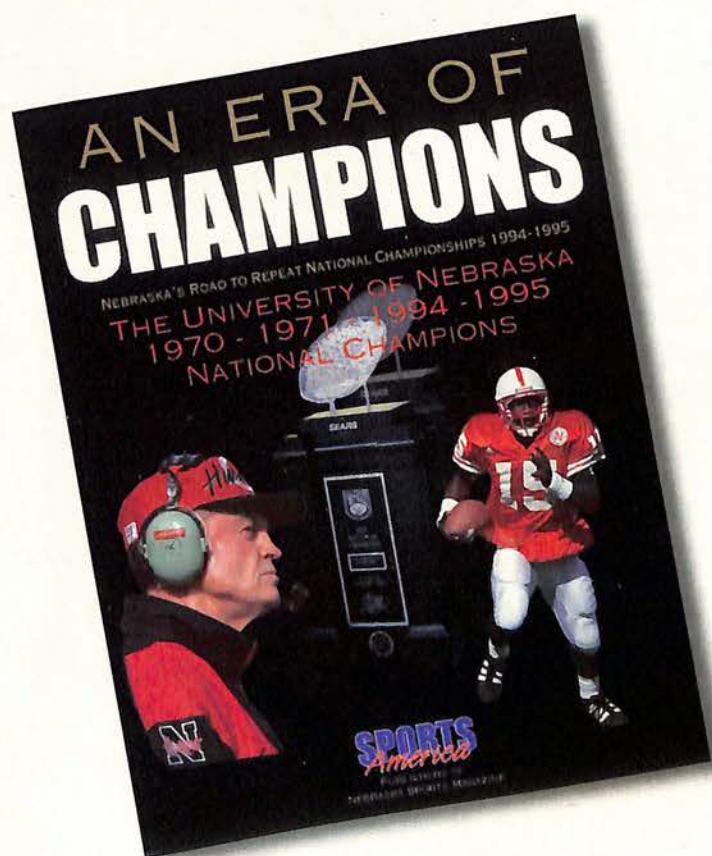
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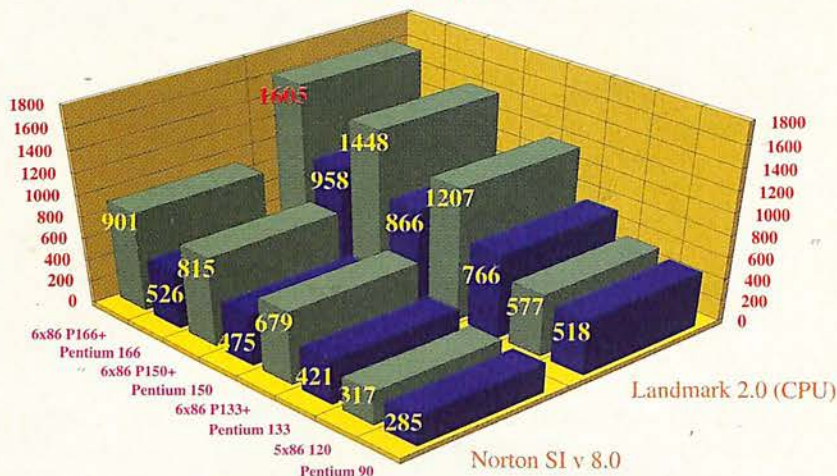


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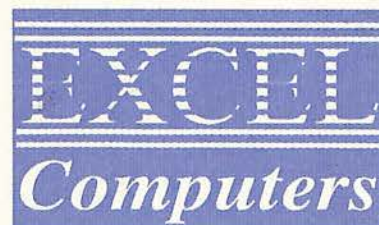


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